DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 264 CE 080 877

AUTHOR Kump, Ann; Petersen, Pat; Fruin, Jerry; Koritko, Laurie; Ramsburger, Peter

TITLE Tests and Other Assessments: Helping You Make Better Career Decisions.

INSTITUTION National Center for Occupational Information Network Development (DOL/ETA), Washington, DC.; North Carolina Employment Security Commission, Raleigh.; Utah State Dept. of Employment Security, Salt Lake City.

PUB DATE 1999-09-17

NOTE 62p.

AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://wdr.doleta.gov/opr/FULLTEXT/99-testassess.pdf. Also available to sensory impaired individuals upon request by calling: Tel: 202-219-7664 or TDD: 800-326-2577.

PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Achievement Tests; *Career Choice; Career Education; Career Exploration; Career Guidance; *Career Planning; *Decision Making; Disabilities; Educational Certificates; Employment Services; Interest Inventories; *Occupational Tests; Performance Tests; Personality Measures; Scores; Student Certification; *Test Coaching; *Test Wiseness

IDENTIFIERS Americans with Disabilities Act 1990

ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to help the user better understand the different types of career assessments and how the user and others may want to use them to make career decisions. Information is presented in question and answer format. These topics are covered: how assessment tests can help; how assessments are used by counselors and employers; how tests can help one get licensed or credentialed for a job; what some different kinds of tests and assessment tools are; how the assessments and other tests will look; where one can go for testing; how to prepare for a test; what one should do when the testing day comes; what good test-taking strategies are; what the test scores mean; what to do if one needs to retest; what about testing for a person with a disability; and how long assessment scores can be used. Additional sources of information are appended, including information on specific tests; testing preparation services; general information; employment/career information; and the Americans with Disabilities Act. (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original document.

ED 446 264

TESTS AND OTHER ASSESSMENTS:

Helping You Make Better Career Decisions

September 17, 1999

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Use of the names of individual tests is for illustrative purposes only and should NOT be interpreted as a recommendation for any test instrument.

National Center for O*NET Development, 1999

Acknowledgments

Tests and Other Assessments: Helping You Make Better Career Decisions was produced and funded by the United States Department of Labor's O*NET Project. The O*NET Project is directed by Donna Dye.

This publication was prepared under Department of Labor Grants with the North Carolina Employment Security Commission, the Utah Department of Employment Security and the National O*NET Consortium. The development of the document was directed by David Rivkin and Phil Lewis. Mr. Rivkin also served as editor. Authors of the Guide were Ann Kump, Pat Petersen, Jerry Fruin, Laurie Koritko and Peter Ramsburger. Grateful acknowledgment is made to Jeannie Stroupe, Carolyn Harris, Mike Ingerick, Elizabeth McKenzie, Brenda Dunn, Jerry Pickett, and Kristen Fiske for their contributions. Special thanks is given to the United States Department of Labor's America's Learning Exchange for their contribution.

Special Notice

Material in this publication is in the public domain and may be reproduced, fully or partially, without permission of the federal government. Source credit is requested but not required. Permission is required only to reproduce copyrighted material contained herein.

This material will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request.
Voice phone: (202) 219-7664

TDD* phone: (800) 326-2577

*Telecommunications Device for the Deaf

Table of Contents

Welcome 1

How can assessment tests help me? 2

How are assessments used by counselors and employers? 4

How can tests help me get licensed or credentialed for a job? 6

What are some different kinds of tests and assessment tools? 10

How will the assessments and other tests look? 15

Where can I go for testing? 19

How can I prepare for a test? 22

What should I do when the testing day comes? 25

What are good test-taking strategies? 27

What do the test scores mean? 30

What if I need to retest? 38

What about testing for a person with a disability? 41

How long can assessment scores be used? 43

Final thoughts 45

Additional sources of information 46

Welcome!

You are about to make a career decision – taking a course, applying for college, interviewing for a job, accepting a new job. It is just one of the many career decisions that you will make throughout your working life. Tests – also called assessments, inventories, or career decision-making tools – are available to you, counselors, and employers to help make the best career decisions possible. This guide will help you better understand the different types of career assessments and how you and others may want to use them to make career decisions.

So, soon you need to take an assessment tool for:

(✗ check one)
- ☐ career exploration
- ☐ the Employment Service
- ☐ an employer
- ☐ school

and you would like to know what to expect. Your questions about assessments, often called tests, are probably the same ones other people have. This guide will answer many of the questions you have. It also provides additional **Sources of Information** (see pg. 46), including Websites that can help you further explore tests and other assessments for career decision making. By knowing more about *testing* and *test strategy*, you can feel better about taking your test, and possibly improve your performance.

How can assessment tests help me?

Question: *Why should I take an assessment test?*

Answer: There are three basic reasons to take career-related tests and assessments:

1. They tell you about yourself.
2. They tell counselors about you.
3. They tell employers about you.

Tests can help you better understand your strengths by identifying areas in which you already have skills, abilities, and interests. They can also alert you to areas for which you need to develop your strengths. You can make decisions about your career path with more confidence if you understand what you like (and don't like), as well as what you do well (and not-so-well). A test that steers you *away* from one kind of job or training program can also help steer you *toward* another.

There are a lot of situations in which assessments can help on your career path:

- You may just be entering the job market and are unsure of the type of training you need to help you get a good job, or even what type of job you would like. Assessments can help you focus your search for training or a career.

- You may be receiving some financial assistance for your training from an agency. The agency may want to assess your capabilities so they can help provide you with the right type of training.

- You may have been looking for a job, but you haven't been successful because you don't have a diploma or the required certificate. You can take tests to get a certificate or a diploma.

- You may have a job that you don't like, but you don't know where else to look for another one. Assessments can help you identify careers with a future.

- You may be in an industry using new technology. Your job has disappeared, and you need to retrain and upgrade your skills. Tests can help you identify your particular training needs for high technology jobs.

- You expect layoffs at your company, and you are interested in exploring other career options. Assessments can help direct you toward other jobs that might suit you.

- You may have a disability, but you know you can be successful. Assessments can help you identify your strengths and abilities.

- You may be re-entering the job market, and you want to identify and improve your skills. You want to learn how your skills match with the new "World of Work." Tests and other assessments can help.

- You are up for a promotion. Taking an examination is a common part of the promotions procedure.

As you can see, there are many "employment situations" in which assessments can help provide important information. This Guide will help you better understand tests and testing procedures. Hopefully, the Guide will make you feel more comfortable about tests—which can improve your test-taking performance.

How are assessments used by counselors and employers?

Question: *How can a counselor use assessments?*

Answer: Often counselors are trained in interpreting many kinds of assessments. They match information about you (obtained from tests) with the characteristics of jobs. Then they share that information with you, and together you can figure out how well different types of jobs, training, or apprenticeships fit your particular interests, skills, and strengths. Information regarding some tests that counselors may use is available from Consulting Psychologists Press on www.cpp-db.com

Question: *What about employers? How do they use tests and other types of assessments?*

Answer: Employers like to hire, train, and promote employees who

- do a good job,
- like the work, and
- want to stay with the company for a long time.

Employers can use assessments to help them select applicants who are more likely to do these things. There are several types of tests that can be used by employers. Some tests can not legally be administered until a job offer is made, while others can be used as part of the selection process. Some legal considerations and possible tests are reviewed on

www.smallbiz.findlaw.com/text/p05_0950.stm

Question: *Can an assessment affect my chances for getting a job or being accepted into a training program?*

Answer: Yes. Tests can help narrow the list of applicants to those who are best suited to a particular job or training program. Your scores on a test can either increase or reduce your chances of being chosen for a particular job or training program.

Question: *Are tests used with other information to help make career decisions?*

Answer: Yes. Counselors, employers, and individuals making career decisions frequently use interviews, work experience, education, references, work tryouts, apprenticeships, or other sources of information to make decisions or to help their clients make decisions. The more information they know about you (and the more you know about yourself), the more likely it is that you will make positive career decisions.

How can tests help me get licensed or credentialed for a job?

Question: *Don't you sometimes have to take a test to prove that you are qualified to perform a particular job?*

Answer: There are jobs that people must or can have credentials to perform. Sometimes taking and passing a test is required to get that credential. In addition, education or training programs that are offered to prepare you for various jobs may provide a credential indicating that you possess the skills necessary to perform the job. The credentials individuals can receive come in two forms: **licenses** and **certification**. Education and training programs are certified through the process of **accreditation**.

Licenses

In some states, individuals must have a license to perform certain jobs. To get a license, you may need a particular amount of experience doing the job during training or as an apprentice. Or you may have to take certain courses or training programs. Taking a test may be all or part of the license requirements. That is, you may have to pass a test *and* have other qualifications, or the test may be the only requirement.

Tests developed to screen people for licenses come from a variety of sources. In some cases, the **Federal Government** is the source of tests. For instance, the Federal Aviation Administration grants licenses to certain types of aircraft maintenance personnel. The **individual states** granting licenses may have a test of their own.

In other cases, it may be a test developed by a **professional association**, such as the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants or the American Veterinary Medical Association.

A good source of information on jobs that require licenses and the related qualifications is the Licensed Occupation Information System (LOIS) http://165.206.254.241/form00.cfm Here you can search by state and/or occupation to see what the license requirements are, including the tests that you may be required to take to obtain a particular license.

Certification

Being certified in an occupation is another way of demonstrating that you have the skills and abilities required to perform a particular job. The primary difference is that certification is not typically **required** for you to do the job, although in some cases you have to be certified in order to obtain a license. Generally speaking, there are three types of certification:

- National or State certifications that are awarded based on requirements specified by the government offering the certification.
- Certifications granted by professional organizations. Examples include the National Society of Professional Surveyors and the National Certification in Therapeutic Massage.
- Certifications issued by companies in the private sector for specific jobs or products. Examples include fields such as engineering and various types of computer software.

As with licensing, certification requirements vary by occupation or product. They may require a certain level of training, education, or experience in a supervised setting. Passing an examination or test may also be required, alone or in conjunction with other qualifications such as those mentioned.

How are license and certification exams developed?

Tests that are part of the licensing or certification process are typically developed in several phases. First, the skills and knowledge needed to perform the job are identified. This can be done in a variety of ways, including observing people performing the job and seeing what it is they need to know and do on the job. Another way of identifying skills and knowledge necessary to do a job is to survey job experts and ask them what skills are needed. Tests are then developed that accurately reflect the occupational skills and knowledge that have been identified. The tests are validated through consultation with experts and/or by trying them out in real-world settings. The test then has to be administered in a secure manner and updated as necessary to reflect changes that occur in the jobs being certified.

How are license and certification exams different from other tests?

Typically, you take a license or certification exam after you have the right education, training, or work experience. You want to do everything possible to pass the exam on the first try. Often there are fees involved, and, if you don't pass, there may be a waiting period before you can take the test again.

In many ways, however, certification and licensing tests are very much like others you will be reading about in this Guide. They vary in format (multiple choice, essay) and delivery method (paper-and-pencil, computer-based) just like the other tests discussed. The test-taking strategies provided also apply. The key difference is that, because they may affect your ability to qualify for a particular job, you want to be really sure you are well prepared before you take a licensure or certification test.

Accreditation

Schools and other educational institutions obtain accreditation to show that they offer the right kind of program to prepare someone for an occupation, job, or degree. Accreditation is given by recognized authorities, who examine the school's courses, facilities, and other offerings to make sure that they are good enough to provide the skills and knowledge that they promise. Examples include the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools.

When you are thinking about attending a school or taking a course of instruction to obtain a license or credential, be sure and check to see if it is accredited. On-line resources for doing this include America's Learning Exchange http://www.alx.org and the Department of Education http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/Students/Accred.html

What are some different kinds of tests and assessment tools?

Question: *What kinds of tests and assessments can help me choose a career, choose training, or get a job interview or a promotion?*

Answer: There are many different types of assessments that can be used for different career-related activities. Below are some types of tests you might be asked to take or you might want to take.

The first group of instruments presented below measure such things as your knowledge, skills, or abilities. They usually have right or wrong answers. They are sometimes called **PERFORMANCE TESTS**. If you study for these tests, you can usually improve your score. Here are some of the different types of performance tests:

- **Achievement Tests** measure how well you know a subject like computers, reading, or nutrition. This kind of test may be required to enter a formal training program or to prove that you have mastered specific material. On-line information regarding achievement tests is available at www.smallbiz.findlaw.com/text/p05_1000.stm

  Training programs can require that a person pass a basic achievement test, like the *Adult Basic Learning Examination* (ABLE), before entering the program. The *Tests of General Educational Development* (GED) are another set of well-known achievement tests. Successful completion of the GED demonstrates knowledge equivalent to a high school diploma. On-line information regarding the GED, including who can take the test, what material you need to know to pass, how you can prepare, and what scores are required to pass is available on www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed314430.html

- **Ability Tests** measure how able you are to learn or to succeed at a particular task. Ability tests usually include a number of different sections. Each section measures a different ability. Often included are sections on arithmetic, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Dexterity sections may also be included.

  Ability tests can be used to predict how well you might perform in a training program or on a job. They can help identify your strongest abilities, as well as those for which you might need some additional education and training.

- **Skills Tests** measure how well you can perform a particular skill. Typing tests and welding tests both are skills assessments showing that you can really do what you say you can do at the time you take the test.

  Skills assessments may be given by an employment office, school or training program, special vocational board, or employer. The results are often given to you on a certificate that you can present with your other credentials when you apply for a job.

TIP: Skills can be learned. It just takes knowledge, practice, and persistence.

- **Literacy Tests** can help evaluate how well you can read, write, or use numbers in printed material. They are designed to assist you in identifying appropriate training programs, tell you how your literacy skills compare with those of others in the workforce, evaluate your progress in training

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

programs over time, or even tell trainers how effective their programs are. The National Institute for Literacy http://novel.nifl.gov has information regarding literacy tests and provides links to state sites so you can find sites local to your home offering literacy improvement services.

The second group of instruments presented are career tools that can measure personal characteristics like interests, work values, and personality traits. These are often referred to as **ASSESSMENT TOOLS**, and since they don't have right or wrong answers, there is no need to study for them. They help you find out more information about yourself that you can use to make better career choices. Here are some different types of assessment tools:

- **Interest Inventories** have no right or wrong answers, and no pass or fail grades. An interest inventory helps you identify your interests, especially those related to the world of work. It is designed to assist you in identifying training, education, or careers with activities that you might like doing.

- **Work Values Instruments** allow you to pinpoint what you value in jobs (such as achievement, autonomy, recognition, support, and conditions of work). You can identify occupations you are likely to find satisfying based on the similarity between your work values and the characteristics of jobs.

- **Personality Measures** help to identify your personal style in dealing with tasks, data, and other people. Your personality can be well suited for some kinds of jobs and not-so-well suited for other kinds. For example, if you are an outgoing person, you might prefer working with people most of the time, while another person might prefer working alone. An understanding of your personality helps you to make decisions about training programs, which jobs to apply for, or which career direction to take. Information employers must consider before administering personality tests is

available on-line www.smallbiz.findlaw.com/text/p05_1020.stm

- **Biodata Instruments** are questionnaires that are designed to gather information about the skills and other personal qualities you have used in previous jobs, hobbies, or school. That information is used to match your skills with jobs or training that require similar skills and qualities.

  The questions on a biodata test will be just about you and your activities.

- **Honesty Tests** are specialized personality tests designed to tell prospective employers which applicants will "follow the rules." Sometimes they are even used to determine who is more likely to steal from the company. The questions are generally about what you have done in certain situations in the past, what you think you would do in the future, or your attitude toward someone or something. Additional information regarding honesty tests is available on-line www.smallbiz.findlaw.com/text/p05_1040.stm Sometimes lie detectors are used for honesty tests. Information about legal issues regarding lie detector testing is available on-line www.smallbiz.findlaw.com/text/p05_1035.stm

The last type of instruments presented is **MEDICAL TESTS**. Sometimes after being offered a job, you will be asked to take a medical examination. The employer might tell you that before you can be officially hired, you will need to pass a medical test. Here are two of the most common types of medical examinations:

- **Physical Examinations** can be required by an employer **after** you have been offered a job. They can be used to find out if you have a physical condition that would prevent you from doing the job. If you have a condition or disability that might prevent you from getting a job, you should talk it over with a counselor. Information regarding legal considerations for you when taking medical tests for employers is available at www.smallbiz.findlaw.com/text/p05_1105.stm

- **Drug Tests** usually require the analysis of urine and sometimes blood to identify illegal drugs in the body. They are used by employers before finalizing the hiring of new employees and to identify current employees who are drug users. Drug tests are often "random," meaning the employee is not told when they will occur. Drug tests are used to ensure a "Drug-free Workplace."

  There are some foods and legal drugs that may cause a drug test to be mistakenly positive. When taking a drug test, be sure to list any medications you are using. If your test results indicate that you use illegal drugs when you don't, you should ask for a more sensitive test.

  Your legal rights regarding drug testing for employers and information regarding protected groups are available at www.smallbiz.findlaw.com/text/p05_1075.stm

How will the assessments and other tests look?

Question: *What kinds of questions can I expect? Do most tests have a common format?*

Answer: There are a lot of different ways to ask questions and many different formats. You could find several different styles of test questions. When you find out that you are going to be taking a test, ask for a description of the test and sample questions or a sample test.

Paper-and-Pencil. Many tests are presented in a paper-and-pencil format. Some of the different kinds of paper-and-pencil tests are:

- ***Multiple Choice*** (has several answers to choose from)
  For example:
  Which of the following words has a meaning most similar to 'mundane'?
  A. sublime
  B. dull
  C. mercurial
  D. laborious

- ***True-False* or *Yes-No***
  For example:
  The product of 7 and 9 is 56.
  A. True
  B. False

- ***Matching*** (questions in one column and answers in another)
  For example: Match the states in the left column with the corresponding state capitals in the right column.

Maine	Springfield
Illinois	Topeka
Delaware	Augusta
Kansas	Portland
--------	Dover

- ***Ratings*** (For example: rate each answer choice from 1 to 5, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, from most like me to least like me)

  I enjoy working outdoors.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

- ***Short Answer*** (or Fill-in-the-Blank)
  For example:
  How many fluid ounces are in one cup?
  (Answer: 8 ounces)

- ***Essay*** (write out the answers)
  For example:
  Explain the primary functions of Vitamin D in the human body.

Hands-On. Hands-On tests may seem more like "activities" than tests. They could include instructions for handling data or situations you might have on a job. You might be asked to talk about the actions you would take, act out a role, do a simulation of a task, or perform an activity you would do on the job.

Self-Assessments. Some counseling tools have been prepared in a self-assessment format. You might be able to take the instrument at home and then score it yourself. These instructions allow you to understand the scores on your own.

There are several Websites that provide information regarding self-assessments. Several colleges, including El Paso Community College www.epcc.edu/Projects/IVALP/sassess.htm and Montana State University www.montana.edu/wwwcp/selfas.html have suggestions regarding types of self-assessments you may want to try.

Computerized. Some tests are computerized. Rather than answering on paper, you answer on the computer. Computerized tests may include the very same questions presented in the same order as corresponding pencil-and-paper tests. But some tests administered on a computer can

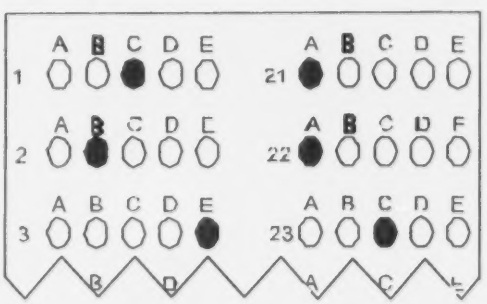
select the next question based on your last answer. (This is called a computer adaptive test or CAT.) If you answer correctly, the next question might be a little harder. If your last answer was wrong, the next question could be a little easier.

Question: Where do I answer the questions on a test?

Answer: Just as test questions are presented in many different ways, there are many different kinds of test answer sheets. On some tests, you can answer the questions right in the test booklet. Others have a separate answer sheet for recording your answers.

Look at the example below. This is a computerized answer sheet. Your answers are scored by a computer. On the answer sheet you are asked to fill in the circles under each of your answers. So in question 1, if your answer was C, you would fill in the circle under C. Notice also that the question numbers go down the side of the page, and the answer choices (A,B,C,D,E) go across the top of the page.

To answer questions using this kind of answer sheet, the answer choices will usually be across the top and the number of the question will be along the left side.



Where can I go for testing?

Question: *OK, I think I might like to take some tests to help me make career decisions. Where do I go? What will it cost?*

Answer: There are lots of different places to go to take assessment tools that can help you with career decisions. Note, that each place may provide different types of testing services depending on their purpose and priorities. Some organizations give tests as part of a career counseling program. Others give tests to help select people for jobs or training or acceptance in a particular school. They are private organizations that give tests as part of their business. You should look for places whose priorities match your needs.

- **State Agencies** like one-stop career centers, workforce service offices, employment service offices, vocational rehabilitation services, or family or social service offices usually have assessment programs. If the test is given at a state or federal agency, there often is no cost to you. If there is a charge, it is generally low, usually just enough to cover the cost of materials.

  There are sometimes excellent counselors (or trained interviewers) available in these offices who can help you choose what tests to take and help you interpret and use your results. Also, tell your counselor about other tests you have taken in the past. They may be able to help you use these results as well. You might not need to take any more assessments.

- **Educational Facilities,** such as high schools, vocational training centers, community colleges, and testing centers in colleges and universities, often have excellent assessment programs. There is sometimes a charge for testing, but it is often lower for students than for the general public. You might want to ask the testing center about the availability and costs of various types of tests, including tests you can take on your own at your own convenience. Also, ask about the availability and cost for counseling to help you interpret your results.

- **Private Assessment Centers** are often located in private employment agencies. They may have a library of career-related tests and job/career counselors on staff. Ask about the costs before you begin a testing or counseling program because these centers can be expensive.

- **Human Resource Offices** in some larger companies have testing services for their current employees. Services provided may include career guidance, career development, or outplacement services. Companies with in-house training departments may also use assessments to evaluate training programs.

  Usually there is no cost for taking tests given by employers. But if you are an applicant, you probably will *not* be able to select the tests, *or* use the results for other employers. Test results are used by employers to help select workers for jobs or training programs. The personnel office may have test counselors or personnel officers who will discuss the results of a test that you take in their office.

- **Military Recruiting Offices** and induction centers have excellent testing facilities and trained counselors. Some of their tests are offered at high schools to help students plan their career after graduation. Assessments are also provided to those who want to explore military careers.

  Information for each of the branches of the military is available on-line: Navy www.navyjobs.com , Marine Corps www.usmc.mil , Army www.goarmy.com , Coast Guard www.uscg.mil , and Air Force www.airforce.com

How can I prepare for a test?

Question: *What can I do to get ready to take a guidance test?*

Answer: You can prepare differently for different types of assessments. For example, to get ready to take an ***interest inventory*** think about

- things (ideas, activities) that have been important to you,
- things you have done well,
- things you really liked doing,
- appointed or elected positions you have held (school/organizations/jobs),
- hobbies, and
- activities involved with past jobs.

Achievement tests and other types of tests that have "right and wrong" answers can take more preparation. You may want to study or practice to get ready to take an exam that will test how much you know, or how well you do something. You might review the subject or practice the skill on your own.

Your community college may offer courses on test preparation. The local library may have publishers' information about tests, or even sample tests. Often, written information is available that describes the test and provides sample questions. Well in advance of the test, ask the testing site for test information and sample questions.

It's sometimes a good idea to take a test to get used to the testing procedure—and help relieve the "jitters." Check with your local workforce service office, employment service office, one-stop career center, community college, vocational training center, or the testing center at a college or university to find out about tests that are similar to the one you plan to take.

Question: *I've heard that there are some tests for which a person can't prepare. Is there any way to get ready for that kind of test?*

Answer: There are tests that don't have right or wrong answers—like an interest inventory, work values instrument, personality test, or biodata test. You can't "study" for these tools, but you can find out about the topics they will cover so you can feel prepared. You might want to take a practice instrument so you will feel more comfortable when you have to take the real thing.

Question: *What about ability tests? Can you prepare?*

Answer: Although you won't find a class or a workbook that covers the same problems as the test, there are still some things you can do to help you get your best possible score.

Basic arithmetic (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, percentages, and story problems) is included in most ability tests. Use textbooks, workbooks, and flash cards to brush up on your arithmetic skills. You might even want to take some math courses.

Reading comprehension and vocabulary are often part of ability tests. Using the dictionary and reading on a regular basis (such as 30 minutes a day, *every day*, with the newspaper) sharpens your comprehension and your ability to see different words. Reading also increases your vocabulary.

Be physically and mentally alert so you can do your best on an ability test. Try to choose a testing day when you are rested, healthy, and have not been taking any kind of medication that might slow your responses or affect your thinking. You want to feel good so you can do your best.

Issues employers must consider regarding ability tests is available on-line
www.smallbiz.findlaw.com/text/p05_1010.stm

What should I do when the testing day comes?

Question: *Do you have any tips for the day of the test that will help me do well?*

Answer: Absolutely! Here are some pointers:

- Plan to be at the testing site a little early so you can get a parking spot, get checked in, and look the place over.
- Have confidence in yourself. Sure, you may feel a little nervous, but that's not a bad thing. A little nervousness can actually help you by keeping you more alert.
- If you normally need hearing aids or glasses for reading, be sure that you have them with you.
- Arrive rested. Nothing is better for your test-taking efforts than a good night's sleep the night before.
- Don't try to take career-related tests if you are ill or are taking medication that could slow your responses.
- Try some relaxation exercises before beginning the test. Head and shoulder rolls, stretches, and deep breathing are among the techniques that may help.

- If you are planning to take a test requiring finger dexterity, don't come in with long fingernails (real or not) that will get in your way, slow you down, or cause you to make unnecessary errors.

- Wear comfortable clothing. Avoid anything tight or uncomfortable that might distract you.

- Wear a watch. Sometimes you can pace yourself if you know how much time you have left.

Question: *Can I take my calculator into the test with me?*

Answer: Sometimes you can. It all depends on the test. Ask about using a calculator when you schedule the testing.

Question: *Can I take notes with me into the test?*

Answer: Usually not, but you can ask.

What are good test-taking strategies?

Question: *What advice can you give me for actually taking the test?*

Answer: Here are some hints that might help you do better:

- Ask questions. There is no such thing as a "dumb question." Ask until you are sure you understand what you are expected to do and how you will be scored.
- Be sure that you know how incorrect answers and questions not answered are scored. If there is a penalty for wrong answers, you need to know that before you start. In these situations, guessing will be more likely to hurt your score. If there is no penalty for wrong answers, guessing can only help you, not hurt you.
- Follow directions. Listen *and* read the directions. Don't assume that you already know what to do because you took a similar test. Different tests have different instructions.
- Read each question carefully. Pay attention to words like *always, never, all, none, only.* They mean exactly what they say.
- If you think you know the answer, you probably do! You don't have to be 100% certain before you answer a question. (If there is an unusually heavy penalty for wrong answers, however, disregard this comment.)

- If you have time, review your answers. Check to see that you did not misread a question, skip a page, leave blanks where you know the answer, or make other careless mistakes.

- Fill in your answers very carefully. If you put the right answer in the wrong space, it counts the same as missing the question. Double check to be sure that you are marking your answers next to the correct number on the answer sheet. Don't make stray marks on the answer sheet. Those marks could be read by a computer as answers!

- Change an answer only if you are quite sure that it is wrong.

- If you do change your mind about an answer, erase the old answer completely.

Tips for Taking Timed Tests:

- Budget your time. Glance over the whole test before you start. *(Unless you are told not to turn any pages.)*

- Pay attention to how many questions there are, what kinds of questions, and how hard they look. Compare that to how long you have to complete the section. By estimating how long to spend on each question, you will be able to keep track of your progress.

- Use your time wisely. Pace yourself so you will have enough time to answer each question.

- On a piece of scratch paper, write the number of each question that you can't answer or that you feel unsure of your answer. If you have time at the end, review those questions. It often happens that a later question will trigger your memory for an answer that you needed earlier.

Tips for Multiple Choice Questions:

- Consider each choice carefully. Try not to quickly pick one good answer before reading the other choices that may be even better.
- If you can eliminate one or two choices, decide among the remaining choices. Usually some choices are not reasonable and can easily be eliminated.
- Look for grammatical clues. If an answer choice does not fit grammatically with the question, it is probably wrong.
- Only mark one answer unless you are told specifically to mark all correct answers. A right answer plus a wrong answer usually counts as wrong!

What do the test scores mean?

Question: *How soon will I know the results of the test I took?*

Answer: Each test has its own scoring method and each method is different. If the tests you take can be scored on-the-spot, results will likely be available the same day. Other tests take more time to score. For example, some tests may need to be processed through a computer that reads your answers. Some need to be sent to the publisher for scoring and may take a week or more. Still others will be hand-scored and double checked by another person.

You may get the results of a test within minutes after taking it. You may be asked to check back by phone to see when your test results will be ready. You may even get them in the mail.

Score self-assessment tests carefully. These tests are designed so you can interpret the results yourself. Go over the instructions for interpretation and apply them to your test. Use your common sense to match these results to what you already know about yourself and to the results of other assessments you may have taken.

The important thing for you to remember is to *ask*, at the time you take the test, when and how you will get the results. If the test is suggested by a career counselor, you may want to schedule an appointment with the counselor to go over the test results soon after receiving them.

Question: *Test scores often confuse me. What do the scores mean?*

Answer: Scoring systems will vary depending on the test design and the intended use of the test scores. For some of the tests, you may have a number or a letter score. (Remember the 93% or A- you got in school? The scores may look like those, or they may look different.) Some tests may show you a graph; some scores may be descriptions.

Always read written explanations of the scores that are provided; they may indicate something different than you think. Ask at the test site for help in understanding your scores. If a counselor is available to help you understand your scores, listen carefully.

Question: *What kinds of scores will I get?*

Answer: Test reports may provide several different types of scores. The raw score (which you may or may not see) is a count of the number of right answers (or wrong answers). It does not make sense without some other information such as: the highest possible score or the average score.

Most raw scores are changed into converted scores to give the scores meaning. Converted scores include grade equivalent scores, standard scores, ranked scores, and percentile scores.

A ***grade equivalent score*** *indicates a score that is average for that school grade.*

Example of a grade equivalent score:

An electronics technician training course requires that trainees have eighth grade math comprehension skills. Suppose that you score 9.3 on the math section of an achievement test. A score of 9.3 is average for a student three months into the ninth grade. Based on your math score, you could expect to be accepted into training.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

***Standard scores** indicate where your score lies in comparison to other people who took the te: (also known as the reference group). To understand your standard score, you must also know "average" score, called the mean score, of that reference group.*

Example of a standard score:

Suppose you take an ability test and get a score of 72 on the vocabulary section of the test. The test information shows that the average (mean) score for that section is 50. There is also a graph showing that most people score around 50 on the vocabulary section. Based on that information, you know that your score is better than the average and higher than the score most people get on that section of the test.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

***Ranked scores** are developed by collecting many scores from a test and dividing them into group (like high, medium, and low).*

Example of a ranked score:

Suppose you take an interest inventory to help you decide which of several training programs to choose. The result shows **high** interests in *science* and in *outdoor activity*. Your scores for these interests are among the top third of people who completed the inventory. Using the interest scores, you might select a course in environmental science that satisfies both interests.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A percentile score** identifies how your score compares to the scores of other people who have already completed the same test. **It does not tell you how many answers were right or wrong.

Example of a percentile score:
Suppose you take an ability test and your dexterity score is at the 50th percentile. It means you did better on that part of the test than half of the people taking the same test.

***A percentage** is different from a percentile. **It tells you what percent of your answers were righ** You probably remember percentage scores from school. **A percentage measures you against th** test questions.*

Example of percentage:
Suppose that on a pre-employment test you correctly answer seven questions out of ten. Your score is 70% (7 out of 10).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

***A cutting score** (or cut-off score) is the minimum passing score. Candidates scoring at or above the cutting score will be accepted or will be considered in the next phase of the assessment process; those below may be rejected.*

The cutting score may be decided by measuring test performance against performance required on the job.

Example of a cutting score based on performance:

A production contract says the company must ship 700 boxes of nails a day. Each production worker must pack 30 boxes of nails an hour (one every two minutes) to meet that goal. A test requires that you correctly pack five boxes of nails in ten minutes to be hired as a production worker for this company.

A cutting score may be a percentile score.

Example of a percentile cutting score:
Applicants must score at or above the 50th percentile to be invited for an interview.

A cutting score may also be a raw score, or a percentage.

Example:
Applicants must correctly answer at least 14 out of 20 questions, or have a score of 70%.

As you can see, there are many different types of scores you can receive. Remember, talk to a counselor or teacher if you need help understanding your assessment scores. The more you know, the better career decisions you will be able to make.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

What if I need to retest?

Question: *There is a chance that I won't pass my tests. Then what?*

Answer: That concerns most test takers! However, some tests don't have a pass/fail score. They are given to identify traits about you that can't be graded. They can identify things like whether you prefer indoor work or outdoor work and whether you are more comfortable working with people or equipment. There is no need to worry about passing those tests. We all pass!

But there are tests that do have pass/fail scores, and not everyone passes every test. It never feels good if you don't pass, but it still gives some self-knowledge that may help in making a decision. Remember that early in our discussion we mentioned reasons for taking career-related tests. One important reason is to tell you about yourself.

If you don't pass a test, you are still getting some important information about yourself. You might learn that:

- You need to do something to gain the skills that the job requires. (Check with the local adult education center or community college about classes you might need.)
- You might want to look for a different type of job that uses the skills you already have.
- You perform the actual work better than you take tests. (If this is the case, come back later and take the test again, but try to be a little better prepared.)

TIP:

Remember that a score on a test is not a score on your life. A high score doesn't make you a better person; a low score doesn't make you a failure.

Question: *Can I take a test a second time if I don't pass the first time?*

Answer: Usually. Tests that have pass/fail scores can generally be retaken. Some can be taken again very soon; others may have a waiting period.

The big exception on retaking a test is a drug test. If you don't pass a drug test, many companies will **not** give you a second chance. Find out the company policy by asking at the Personnel or Human Resource Office before you submit to a drug test that you think you might not pass.

If this company is important to you, first make the necessary lifestyle changes and then come back for the drug test when you know you can pass.

Question: *What can I do if I don't think I can pass a test to qualify for a training program or a job that I really want?*

Answer: You can improve your chances of passing! Think about a test as a measure of what you know now. It does not measure what you will know tomorrow. Skills that you don't have today, you can get by practicing. Information you don't know today, you can know next week or next year by taking classes or studying at home.

Don't give up on a dream because you aren't ready today; make a plan to be ready tomorrow.

Question: *But I already did poorly on a test I needed to pass. What can I do now?*

Answer: Most tests allow retesting. For some, there may be a waiting period before you can retake a test. If you didn't do well the first time, a waiting period can be to your advantage because it gives you time to improve your skills, do some home study, or take a class. Work on improving your skills before you apply to retake the test!

What about testing for a person with a disability?

Question: *If I have a disability, should I still take career-related assessments?*

Answer: Yes, people with disabilities should use assessment tests for the same reasons that everyone else uses them: to identify their strengths and areas for which they might need additional training. Assessments can help!

Use careful thought before taking selection tests. Career counselors can work with you to help you choose appropriate guidance and selection tools.

Question: *Some tests will be hard for me to take because of my disability. Will they make accommodations for me?*

Answer: They need to! The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (1980) requires employers who have fifteen or more employees to provide reasonable accommodations so that qualified individuals with disabilities have equal employment opportunities. If you have problems obtaining accommodations, you may want to contact the local agency working with employment questions for individuals with disabilities. They will have experience in working with employers and training sites.

Information regarding ADA issues is available at www.ada-infonet.org

Question: *What accommodations can be made so that I can take an assessment?*

Answer: Take the initiative and request accommodations. Explain what special assistance you require. Be ready to document your need for accommodations. Some of the accommodations people have requested are: accessible parking or ramps so that you can get to the test site, "up-front" seating, extra time between sections of the test, or a special size testing area. Other accommodations you could request include braille or audiotape tests with the option of oral response, large-print test booklets, a proctor to mark your answer sheet, a sign language interpreter, or extra time to complete the test.

Standardized tests present still a different challenge. Standardized tests, by definition, should be given in the same way to all participants. So it may be hard to make accommodations. The employer should, however, make every attempt to meet your needs.

If, after exploring all possibilities with the employer, the accommodation you need is not possible, then ask the employer to waive the test. Instead of test scores, present your work record, recommendations from teachers and past employers, your life experience, and training.

Question: *Who makes the arrangements for accommodations?*

Answer: For most accommodations, let the staff at the testing site know what you need ahead of time. They will make the arrangements. If you have, or know about, special resources (such as a sign language interpreter) that the testing site might not have, let them know.

How long can assessment scores be used?

Question: *Are scores on tests I took several years ago still good?*

Answer: It depends on the kind of test and the reason for testing. Some test scores are not good after six months, while other test scores are still good after five years or longer. Ask how long the score will be on record when you take the test, or when you give the score to a counselor or employer.

Question: *What about tests I take by myself? How do I know if they're still good?*

Answer: It depends on the type of test. Personality test scores may be accurate for a number of years, but sometimes you change as you have new experiences. If the personality test is more than a couple of years old AND you think you have changed, you probably have. Take a new instrument before you start using the scores to make decisions.

Ability test scores are usually good for three or more years unless you have completed formal training or a self-study course, or experience you've had on or off the job has increased your abilities.

Interest inventories that identify very specific interests change more than tests that identify more broad interests.

EXAMPLE:

Over several years, it is likely that a general interest in doing physical outdoor work will remain the same, but a specific interest, like being a line repairer for an electric company, may change.

Successful experiences in school or a job, exposure to new experiences, and knowledge of new fields generally increase a person's interests. If you feel that your interests have expanded (or have become more specific) since you last took an interest inventory, they probably have. If you look at the results of an interest inventory that you took a few years ago and they still feel right, they probably are.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Final thoughts

Question: *Do you have any last words for me?*

Answer: Yes, as a matter of fact! You **can** make this a positive experience. Look at testing as your chance to show what you know.

Believe in yourself. If you are prepared and you think you will do well, you are already well on your way to achieving your goal. Good luck!

Additional Sources of Information

Listed below are some additional sources of information that will be useful to you as you further explore the subject of tests and other assessments. The sources listed are not endorsed by the U.S. Department of Labor, the organizations who developed this Guide, or the authors of this Guide. The sources are provided only as additional informational resources that may be helpful to readers in learning more about tests and other assessments.

Information on Specific Tests

There are several Websites devoted to specific tests that may be of interest to you. These provide a great deal of information about the tests, including answers to Frequently Asked Questions, or FAQs. Often there will be sample items to give you an idea of what the test is like. Test dates and sites may also be included.

The American Council on Education (ACE) Website includes information on the General Educational Development (GED) tests which can be taken to attain a high school equivalency. Other ACE programs are also described, including the College Credit Recommendation Service, which seeks to translate work experience into college credits. Web address: www.acenet.edu/

American College Testing (ACT) Program – Provides information about the ACT, another college entrance test accepted by many institutions across the country. The ACT site also describes WORK KEYS, an assessment system for diagnosing worker skill levels and the skills required for various jobs.
Web address: www.act.org/

College Board Online – Provides information about tests offered by the College Board, including the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test, and Advanced Placement exams. Web address: www.collegeboard.org/

Educational Testing Service Network (ETS NET) – The Educational Testing Service (ETS) Website provides information on ETS-produced tests including the Graduate Record Exam and the Graduate Management Admission Test. Web address: www.ets.org/

Graduate Record Exam – Taken by individuals seeking entrance into graduate school in a wide variety of fields. Web address: www.gre.org/

Testing Preparation Services

A variety of sources are available that offer assistance in preparing for standardized tests. You typically have to pay for these services, which provide information and practice in preparing for and taking such tests as the SAT and ACT. Links to such services can be found at: www.scholarshipstuff.com

College PowerPrep – Offers free software, such as one for "diagnosing" SAT performance and potential areas for improvement, as well as helpful test-taking strategies. Although access to this software requires registration, it is free. More comprehensive preparatory and/or digital trainer software for SAT/ACT are available for a price. Includes free daily tips (e.g., Tip of the Day) for taking the SAT or ACT. Web address: www.powerprep.com

Kaplan – Offers free diagnostic software for SAT, LSAT, and MCAT. Registration is required to obtain a copy of this software. A brief overview of major standardized college/graduate entry tests (e.g., GRE, SAT, ACT), including examples of questions given, quick facts, some practice questions, where to register, etc., is accessible through the site. Also includes links to career relevant information (e.g., sample résumé, tips for interviewing, etc.). Web address: www1.kaplan.com

Princeton Review – Provides a very brief overview of major standardized college/graduate school entry tests (e.g., SAT, ACT, GRE), including how the tests are structured, a few tips for taking the tests, etc. Free diagnostic software is offered, but requires registration. Visitors can find information on books and other test preparation materials produced by Princeton. The site also includes career relevant links and information, such as interview and résumé tips. Web address: www.review.com

Test.com, Inc. – Sample tests (generally can preview practice tests for free, but must pay to actually take tests - depends on test) and some basic information on a wide variety of tests from college entrance (e.g., SAT, ACT) to professional (e.g., Civil Service, CPA). Also, section for creating your own test. This section includes some basic information about the types of questions asked on a test. Web address: www.test.com

General Information

There are a variety of sites that offer general information on tests. Although many of these are oriented more towards professionals involved in testing, they often include basic information on test development and standards that may be of interest to those seeking such guidance.

The American Psychological Association (APA) provides information on test standards and guidelines, Joint Committee of Testing Practices, and links to other related Websites. Web address: www.apa.org/science/testing.html

The Association of Test Publishers is a non-profit organization that represents test publishers and assessment providers. This site offers links for those seeking general information on tests and their use in a variety of settings. Web address: www.testpublishers.org

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) provides information regarding tests and links to related sites. This includes reviews of specific tests and answers to FAQs. Web address: www.ericae.net

The Buros Institute of Mental Measurements publishes the *Mental Measurements Yearbook* along with other volumes on tests and assessments. Their focus is more general, covering the entire spectrum of assessments (e.g., psychological, educational). Web address: www.unl.edu/buros

Employment/Career Information

Employment and career information can be found on a variety of sites on the Web. Each state maintains its own Web page with links to state employment and training agencies.

America's Job Bank provides the ability to conduct an on-line search of jobs by occupation, state, and other search criteria. Includes links to America's Learning Exchange, America's Career InfoNet, and America's Talent Bank (electronic résumé service, e.g., can post résumé on-line for others to browse). By registering, one can set up an account to manage his/her career search information on-line. Registration is free. Web address: www.ajb.dni.us

America's Career InfoNet is an on-line source for searching for job market outlooks and trends. A resources section includes links to information on careers, job search aides, relocation, and so on. Web address: www.acinet.org

America's One-Stop Career Center System provides links to America's Job Bank, America's Career InfoNet, and America's Learning Exchange. Also links to some general information for job seekers (e.g., how to search the Internet for job postings, link to a career development manual) and employers, as well as links to state-run career centers. Web address: www.ttrc.doleta.gov/onestop

DOL's Employment and Training Administration Homepage provides links to the One-Stop Career Center System (above) and information for job seekers and employers. Information for job seekers includes links to on-line sources for searching for job information, how to prepare and pass an interview, and writing résumés. Web address: www.doleta.gov

Military Career Guide Online provides a starting point for information on career in the military (any branch). Includes basic information on training, advancement, etc., and links to additional information regarding the particular branch of interest. Web address: www.militarycareers.com

*Occupational Information Network (O*NET) Homepage* provides information on O*NET, including links for ordering O*NET related products and technical reports. Web address: www.doleta.gov/programs/onet

The Bureau of Labor Statistics Website now has a breakout of career titles in the U.S. It is a source of the jobs divided into several major categories and provides brief descriptions of these jobs. Web address: http://stats.bls.gov/soc/soc_majo.htm

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Information regarding the ADA and its impact on testing can be found at the ADA Information Center Website.

The ADA Information Center provides links to information/documents about ADA, including synopses of the act, sample training/quiz materials, and answers to technical questions. Web address: www.ada-infonet.org